

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL PERTH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0820

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

C O N F I D E N T I A L PERTH 0128

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AS

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S CALLS ON WEST AUSTRALIAN PARTY LEADERS

1. DURING BRIEF VISIT TO PERTH MAY 18 AND 19, AMBASSADOR GREEN HAD INTERESTING SERIES OF CALLS ON PREMIER COURT (LIBERAL) AND OPPOSITION LEADER TONKIN (LABOR) IN MIDST OF CRISIS WHICH HAS LED TO DEMISE OF RULING LIBERAL/COUNTRY COALITION AND MAY RESULT IN MINORITY STATE GOVERNMENT.

2. SIR CHARLES EXPLAINED HE HAD BEEN MORE GENEROUS TO COUNTRY PARTY THEN THEY DESERVED IN OFFERING RECONSTRUCTED COALITION WITH NEW COUNTRY PARTY LEADERS AND SAME NUMBERS OF PORTFOLIOS. HOWEVER HE FELT IT IMPOSSIBLE ALLOT DEPUTY PREMIERSHIP TO COUNTRY PARTY WHOSE NEW LEADERS HAVE ONLY ONE YEARS EXPERIENCE IN PARLIAMENT. PREMIER APPEARED CONFIDENT OX HI TPOLITICAL POSITION AND WILLING TO ACCEPT CONSEQUENCES EVENTUAL REFUSAL COUNTRY PARTY COALESCE ON THDNM ODTERMS

3. SIR CHARLES HELD AMBASSADOR BEYOND ALLOTTED TIME TO IMPRESS UPON HIM VIEW THAT FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT'S POLICY HAD BEEN MOST SKILLFULLY DEvised IN EVERY MOVE TO SOCIALIZE AUSTRALIA BY 1977. HE ASCRIBED THIS TO "MASTERMINDING" OF CAIRNS EXPLAINING THAT WHITLAM HAD NO REAL POWER. IN SUPPORT LATER POINT HE RECOUNTED RECENT MEETING HELD WITH WHITLAM AND HEWITT IN EFFORT PERSUADE FORMER TO ACCEPT COOPERATIVE
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POLICY FOR EXPLORATION NORTHWEST SHELF GAS, AND SAID THAT EVEN

HEWITT WAS ABLE TO FORCE WHITLAM TO TIE CONNER'S OBSTRUCTIONIST LINE.

4. SIR CHARLES PREDICTED SERIOUS BLOWUP DURING JUNE PREMIER'S MEETING TO BE HELD TO RENEW STATE/FEDERAL FIVE YEAR FINANCIAL AGREEMENT. PREMIERS HAVE DEVELOPED PLAN TO PERMIT ADEQUATE GROWTH IN UNTIED FEDERAL GRANTS, BUT HAVE LEARNED FROM TREASURY OFFICIAL THAT PRIME MINISTER IS LIKELY NOT ONLY CONTINUE FINANCIAL SQUEEZE IN STATES BUT ALSO ASSERT POWER TO ESTABLISH UNPRECEDENTED GUIDELINES OVER USE OF UNTIED GRANTS BY CATEGORY OF USE.

5. STATE LABOR PARTY LEADER TONKIN MADE IT ABUNDANTLY CLEAR HE WOULD EXPLOIT LIBERAL/COUNTRY SPLIT RUTHLESSLY BY INTRODUCING FARM MARKETING LEGISLATION WHICH COUNTRY PARTY LEADERS WOULD FEEL COMPELLED TO SUPPORT BY LIBERALS OPPOSE. HE APPEARED CONFIDENT HE COULD BRING COURT DOWN REGARDLESS OF WHETHER COALITION WAS REESTABLISHED OR LIBERAL PARTY WAS GOVERNING ALONE. TONKIN IMPLIED THAT COURT'S UNBENDING STYLE OF LEADERSHIP WOULD MAKE IT FEASIBLE TO DRIVE THIS WEDGE BETWEEN THE COUNTRY AND LIBERAL PARTIES.

6. COMMENT: STATE PARLIAMENT DOES NOT RESUME UNTIL AUGUST AND POLITICAL SCENE COULD BE ALTERED CONSIDERABLY IN INTERVENING PERIOD. ENTIRELY POSSIBLE LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTIES MAY AGREE TO ALLOW "FREE" VOTES ON AGRICULTURAL ISSUES BUT HOLD TOGETHER ON VOTES WHICH WOULD ENTAIL NEW ELECTIONS.
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